

## News Briefs

April 2, 2010

### Active Community Transportation Act of 2010

U.S. Representative Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) introduced H.R. 4722, the Active Community Transportation (ACT) Act of 2010, in the U.S. House of Representatives on Tuesday, March 2, 2010. For the past several years, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) has been working closely with local, state and national partners around the country on the Campaign for Active Transportation.

Building on the successes of the Non-motorized Transportation Pilot Program, the Act would establish a competitive active transportation investment fund, to invest in walking and bicycling improvements in targeted communities around the country. These resources would enable communities to build interconnected systems—allowing people to travel between the places they work, live, play, learn and shop without needing car.

If the act is passed, the U.S. Department of Transportation will administer a competitive fund, which will invest in communities that best make the case for resources to shift large numbers of trips from driving to walking and bicycling.

The two billion-dollar program, with funds set aside within the Surface Transportation Program, will allow dozens of communities nationally to improve their walking and bicycling networks.

### Complete Streets: Best Policy and Implementation Practices

Complete streets accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, transit, and cars, creating multimodal transportation networks. But how do communities achieve complete streets? What are the policies and practices that need to be put into place?

Drawing on lessons learned from more than 30 communities around the country, this report provides insight into successful policy and implementation practices that have resulted in complete streets. Readers will learn how to build support for complete streets, adopt a policy, and integrate complete street concepts into plans, processes, and standards. In addition, this report provides insight into design issues, handling costs, and ways of working with various stakeholders. Case studies highlight communities that have adopted and implemented complete streets, and model policy language provides guidance to communities interested in writing and adopting a complete streets policy.

Complete Streets: Best Policy and Implementation Practices is a product of a joint research project of APA and the National Complete Streets Coalition, with model policies prepared by Public Health Law and Policy.

Resource: <http://www.planning.org/apastore/search/Default.aspx?p=4060>

## **Google Maps Bicycle Directions**

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) is proud to announce its partnership with Google™ as an official content provider for Google Map's brand-new biking directions functionality. The release of this long-awaited feature allows Google Maps users to type in their destination and receive directions for the best bicycling route. Previously, Google was able to provide walking, driving or transit directions. Now, RTC is providing its extensive trail-map data to Google Maps for the seamless integration of safe, accessible and fun bicycling routes into daily travel.

Since 2000, RTC has made its extensive trails database of more than 1,600 rail-trails and connecting corridors free to the public through its trail-finder Web site, TrailLink.com. In 2007, RTC's launched its Mapping Initiative and expanded its library of information to include exclusive and free trail maps. Today, as one of Google's national content partners with trails data in all 50 states, RTC is helping millions more people find trails and enjoy the benefits of bicycling for active transportation and recreation.

"We're thrilled to be working with Rails-to-Trails Conservancy to make RTC's extensive bike trail data available through Google Maps and Google Earth," says Shannon Guymon, Product Manager for Google Maps. "Bikers all over the country now will be able to explore new trails or find specific directions in their local community with just a few clicks of their mouse."

The inclusion of RTC's trail information in Google Maps comes at a time when people are clamoring for biking opportunities. In the last year, RTC has seen an unprecedented surge in its TrailLink.com users. TrailLink.com is the most robust, national resource for rail-trail maps, pictures, descriptions, listings and directions to more than 30,000 miles of trails. "The demand for trail maps and information has never been higher, especially as more people recognize biking as a viable, inexpensive and healthy alternative to driving," says Rails-to-Trails President Keith Laughlin. "Sharing our trail data is an exceptional way to introduce the world to what 150,000 RTC members and supporters already know—biking is the ideal way to get where you're going. The addition of biking directions to Google Maps makes life easier for bikers, whether they are commuting to work or biking for fun, and it can introduce our network of trails to a whole new audience of cyclists-to-be."

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a nonprofit membership organization headquartered in Washington, D.C., is working to create a nationwide network of trails from former rail lines and connecting corridors. RTC is committed to enhancing the health of America's environment, transportation, economy, neighborhoods and people through a nationwide system of trails.

Resource(s): <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2010/03/biking-directions-added-to-google-maps.html>

## **How Have Recent Rezoning's Affected the City's Ability to Grow?**

By Furman Center

In the fall of 2009, the Bloomberg Administration celebrated its 100th rezoning, a significant milestone in an unprecedented series of rezoning ac-

tions that have affected more than one fifth of New York City. Despite the intense scrutiny that has accompanied many individual rezonings, no analysis had been done to look at the cumulative impact that these actions have had on the City's capacity to accommodate new residential growth. A new report by NYU's Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy fills that gap.

The report examines the rezonings that took place between 2003 and 2007, and finds that of the 188,000 lots that were included in a City-initiated rezoning action, 23 percent were downzoned, 14 percent were up-zoned, and almost 63 percent were subject to a contextual-only rezoning (a term for a rezoning that does not significantly change the buildable capacity but otherwise limits the kind of building allowed). Despite the small share of upzonings, on net, these actions increased the City's capacity for new residential building by 1.7 percent, or roughly 100 million square feet of residential capacity.

"Given the scale of rezoning activity during this time, it is critical to take a step back and ask: 'what is the net impact on the City's capacity to accommodate new growth?'" said Vicki Been, faculty director of the Furman Center. "While we find that on paper, the upzonings have added more capacity than the down-zonings have taken away, we also find reason to doubt that all of this new capacity will be built out for residential use, and it remains unclear whether we are on track for creating enough new residential capacity to accommodate the one million new New Yorkers that are expected to live in the City by 2030."

The report finds that different areas of the City have not received equal shares of the new capacity for future growth: Queens and Manhattan had the biggest increases in residential capacity (2.8 percent and 2.3 percent, respectively); Staten Island and Brooklyn had more modest gains (1.4 percent and 1.2 percent gains, respectively); and the Bronx had no net change. The report also finds that capacity changes from rezonings varied widely from neighborhood to neighborhood.

Because there are competing development pressures in the mixed-use areas where new residential capacity has been added, the report questions how much these rezonings will result in new housing units, and cautions that these rezonings alone will not be enough to generate housing to accommodate expected growth.

The report also looks at the distributional implications of where capacity was added and where it was lost. First, it looks at the socio-economic characteristics of rezoned neighborhoods. The report finds that up-zoned lots tended to be located in neighborhoods with a higher proportion of black and Hispanic residents than the median neighborhood in the City. On the other hand, downzoned and contextually-only rezoned lots were more likely to be located in tracts with a higher share of white residents, and smaller shares of black and Hispanic residents than the City median. In addition, the report finds that contextual-only rezoned lots tended to be in areas with much higher median income than that of the City as a whole, while up-zoned and downzoned lots were in areas with median incomes lower than the City.

"There is no general agreement on whether it is good or bad for one's neighborhood to be up-zoned or down-zoned," commented Been. "On the one hand, upzonings can bring needed investment and economic development. On the other, they can lead to congestion and additional strain on a neigh-

neighborhood's infrastructure. The variation in the pattern of rezonings among communities with different socio-economic characteristics calls for a larger conversation about how the benefits and burdens of development should be shared across the City. We hope this analysis will spur new discussions about ways to ensure the City's land use processes result in efficient, sustainable, and fair zoning changes."

The report also looks at the relationship between the rezonings and the transit accessibility of the neighborhoods that gained and lost capacity. Consistent with the City's announced goal of channeling growth to transit rich neighborhoods, it finds that the vast majority of new residential capacity was added in transit rich areas (those within a half-mile walk of a rail entrance). However, the report also finds that a majority of downzoned lots were located in transit rich areas, raising questions about whether rezoning decisions are sufficiently coordinated with infrastructure planning. Accordingly, the report encourages enhanced coordination between the Department of City Planning and the agencies responsible for the City's infrastructure and neighborhood planning.

Finally, the report points to the need for a better understanding of the impact of contextual-only rezonings. A large majority of all rezonings enacted over this time period were contextual-only, yet little is known about the effect these rezonings will have on the cost of building or the kind of development that will take place in rezoned communities. The Furman Center plans to tackle these questions in future research.

Resource:

[http://furmancenter.org/files/publications/Rezonings\\_Furman\\_Center\\_Policy\\_Brief\\_March\\_2010.pdf](http://furmancenter.org/files/publications/Rezonings_Furman_Center_Policy_Brief_March_2010.pdf)